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Muskogee

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

THE HOUSEHOLD

592 Geographical, economic, consanguineal, and religious factors all entered into the evolution of the Creek confederacy. They took concrete shape in the household, family, clan, phratry, clan moiety, town, and town moiety.

[562] Women owned the houses and were permanent occupants, moving only as new houses were built for them or as the entire group to which they belonged migrated seasonally or permanently. These houses were also the homes (hûti) of the nearest male blood relations, those whom the women called "uncles," "brothers," and "sons." They, however, normally went to the homes of their wives as soon as they were married, besides spending much time in the public square and in the tcokofa. On the other hand, aged men, whose wives had died and whose children were grown up and scattered, might come back to the homes of their childhood, or, as frequently happened, they might spend their last years moving from house to house among the women of their own clan connection—never, however, among those of the clan connection of their wives.

[591] [888]

A typical Creek home would therefore consist of a man and woman, their children, one or more sons-in-law, some grandchildren, some aged or dependent individuals of the same clan group, and perhaps an orphan or two or one or more individuals taken in war. These last, though somewhat looked down upon at first, were rapidly assimilated with the tribe which had captured them and soon came to be appreciated in accordance with their proven merit. There was nothing that may properly be called a slave system among the Indians of the Southeast. Where polygamy existed the wives were generally own sisters and usually inhabited the same house, though there were cases in which a man had wives living in two or more distinct houses.

[597] [567] [595]

THE FAMILY

GENERAL REMARKS

601 A fairly accurate clue to the Muskogee conception of the "family" is furnished by the terms of relationship. These consist of a number of root words, not now analyzable, and words formed from these which it is natural to assume are secondary in importance. Many terms are of the "classificatory" type, covering a number of individuals who to our way of thinking bear quite distinct relations to the speaker. Theorists have tried to maintain that this collective use preceded the special or individual use, but so far as the Muskogee are concerned the evidence points to the special application as having been, if not the original, at least the typical or primary. Secondary or derivative

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cleared space or in the immediate neighborhood where the pair would set up housekeeping. As his other girls married this process was repeated. When the children grew up the girls would continue to occupy the ancestral dwellings, or others erected for them in the neighborhood, while the boys would marry elsewhere. A man might erect and pay for a house and call it "my house," but it was to all intents and purposes the property of his wife. "My house" was a term applied by the Chickasaw to his clan as well as to his habitation.[a] By a Creek male the word which has been translated into English as "home" (hûti) was not bestowed upon the house in which he and his wife lived, even though he might have built it himself, but on the houses in which lived the women of his clan. A woman's hûti, or "home," was indeed her home in our understanding of the term, except that the houses occupied by other women of the same clan were also her homes, but a man's hûti was not usually where he spent most of his adult life, but the home of his mother and the other women of his clan. In case a stranger visited the town and made known to what clan he belonged it was the duty of a man married into that clan to invite him to his house. In this case, although neither he nor his wife had set eyes on the man before, he would say to him "Come to your home (hûti)." This duty of hospitality toward a fellow-clansman often brought men outside of the family proper under the same roof, whether they were welcome or not. Sometimes an old man whose children were grown up, or who for any reason was alone in the world, would travel about from one to another of the houses of his female kin. He would say, "Well, I am going to my home," and make for the house of someone who had never seen him before. In later times this struck the young people as very presumptuous, but it was the old law. In the days before there were hotels, restaurants, old peoples' homes, insurance, etc., it was a very convenient device. It not only served to provide for the old, infirm, and indigent, but enabled the adventurous to travel and see more of the world than would otherwise be possible.

The best early account of the arrangement of a Creek village and its dwellings, including also the position of the ceremonial grounds with reference to them, is given by Bartram, and I herewith append it along with the sketch accompanying (fig. 1). He says:

"The general position of the Chunk-Yard and Public Buildings of the Creeks, in respect to the dwellings of the Indians themselves, is shown in the following engraved plan:

"*A* is the Rotunda; *B*, the Public Square; *C*, the grand area or Chunky-Yard. The habitations of the people are placed with considerable regularity in streets or ranges, as indicated in the plan.

[a] Adair, Hist. Am. Inds., p. 17.

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desire him to be made free." Frequently this was done and he suffered no punishment.

Among the Alabama retaliation for murder rested, as among the Creeks, with the clan of the victim. Upon one occasion, after this tribe had removed to Louisiana and Texas, one of the Louisiana Alabama killed another and fled to Texas. Sometime afterward he suddenly appeared among the people he had left while a dance was going on. The men belonging to the clan of the murdered man then got their guns, came to the place, and killed him. He on his part crouched by the fire and made no attempt to escape. Evidently he had decided deliberately that death was better than banishment.

There is no instance recorded of an old person being killed to save his family the trouble of supporting him, and Bartram is insistent that such cases occurred rarely, and only at the earnest request of the victim.[86] Bossu says that "the old people who can not follow during a retreat ask to be killed with blows of clubs, as well to spare them the grief of decrepitude as for fear lest they fall into the hands of their enemies, and be burned or eaten,"[87] but he is careful to explain that death was inflicted upon the aged only from motives of humanity. Says Romans: "They revere old age to excess," but he adds, "in extreme sickness they will out of compassion break the neck of the decrepit or lingering patient."[88]

Infanticide was practiced under certain circumstances, as the following from Swan shows:

"If a young woman becomes pregnant by a fellow whom she had expected to marry, and is disappointed, in revenge, she is authorized by a custom of the country, to destroy the infant at the birth, if she pleases, which is often done, by leaving it to perish in the swamp where it was born, or throwing it into the water. And, indeed, to destroy a new-born infant is not uncommon in families that are grown so numerous as to be supported with difficulty; it is done by mutual consent of the clan and parents, and without remorse."[89]

This is supported by Milfort:

"In this nation the children all belong to the mother, who has the right of life and death over the one to whom she has just given birth, during the first month following her confinement. This time having expired, if she should kill it she would herself be punished with death."[90]

Witchcraft was often given as the reason for killing a certain person, but it must be remembered that the person was not destroyed

[86] Bartram, Travels, p. 497.
[87] Bossu, Nouv. Voy., vol. ii, pp. 32-33.
[88] Nat. Hist. E. and W. Fla., p. 88.
[89] Swan, in Schoolcraft, Ind. Tribes, vol. v, p. 281.
[90] Milfort, Mém., p. 261.

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men who had obtained eagle feathers,[88] and in later times the Seminole of Florida honored in this way one who had killed a certain number of deer.

Moreover, germs of what might be called higher schools of education had come into existence. These were in the care of those men who, in agreement with the usage of ethnologists, would be called medicine men, but there were at least two classes of men to which the title would have to be applied, the healer (aliktca or hilis haya), one of whom officiated at every busk, and the knower (kila), who was a kind of soothsayer or prophet, and in his medical capacity a diagnostician. The first class communicated their knowledge to novices for a certain consideration. They would take from one to four pupils at a time, have them go through a preparation of fasting and sweat bathing somewhere away from the village and then inculcate their mysteries. These mysteries were communicated in courses. The first time the novices would bathe and fast for 4 days on a stretch, the next time for 8 days, and finally for 12 days. The completion of this last was equivalent to the taking of a very high degree and people who had attained it were very much respected. A more particular account of this will be given when we come to speak of Creek medical practice. Jackson Lewis, from whom much of this information comes and who had himself taken two degrees, stated that those who were chosen to conduct war parties came from this class, only that they must be from one of the Red clans, but it is possible that he is speaking of the medicine man who accompanied the party in his professional capacity, not of the actual leader of the party. I have been told that there were also graduates in the telling of myths, and some claimed the powers of wizards, such as an ability to fly, roast the hands in the fire, etc., "by a word." A red line painted from each corner of the mouth indicated that the individual so decorated wanted to play ball, that he was well up in the mysteries and a powerful man generally. These graduates, of whom there were several in each town, were evidently the repositories of learning, the keepers of the sacred myths, the historians, and the guardians of the supernatural mysteries.

The Tukabahchee chief, like many another Indian and white man before and since, thus laments to Hitchcock over the increasing insubordination of the rising generation:

"Young people are not so orderly and obedient to the old people now as they used to be in the old nation. When we tell them to do anything they seem to stop and think about it. Formerly they always went at once and did as they were told; that is, before they came to this country."[89]

[88] Adair, Hist. Am. Inds., p. 96. [89] Hitchcock, MS. notes.

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754 picion was also encouraged by the doctors themselves, who frequently attributed sickness to the doings of witches, and the public mind was kept wrought up to a condition of feverish excitement and fear by the most grewsome tales vouched for as absolute truth.

Says Stiggins:

"They are tinctured with superstition and believe anything of a marvelous report. As soon as it is announced that a man is acquainted with the work and dismal effects of the diabolical art, such as flying about the country far and near to poison such people as are inimical to him, or blowing and infusing a contagious air into a house in passing by it at night or into the nostrils and lungs of a particular person while asleep, by which the wizard often destroyed by instant death a person or an entire family that he did not like—the wizard it was said being seen at twilight only of an evening flying about to do mischief—whenever such a person was found, I say, it was not for him to exculpate himself. He was seized by a mob, tied to a tree with ropes, and lightwood piled arouñd him and set on fire and he burned to death with as little compunction or remorse of conscience as, in the Roman inquisition, many of the most enlightened and well disposed to peace and good order, were brought to a fiery ordeal for the common good." [14]

Hitchcock learned that witches and wizards "can take the form of owls and fly about at night and at day return home in the form of women and men; that they can take the heart and the spirit out of living men and cause their death; that they can cripple people by shooting rags or blood into their legs through a reed or out of their mouths." "Formerly," he was told, "the Indians have been known to knock old women regarded as witches on the head and throw them into the water. Now there is a law against it, but even last year an old woman was killed as a witch." [15]

Adair says that "there are not greater bigots in Europe, nor persons more superstitious, than the Indians, (especially the women) concerning the power of witches, wizards, and evil spirits. It is the chief feature of their idle winter night's chat: and both they, and several of our traders, report very incredible and shocking stories. They will affirm that they have seen, and distinctly, most surprising apparitions, and heard horrid shrieking noises." [16]

754 •888 Suspicion of witchcraft attached not only to doctors and graduates but to old persons of both sexes. I was told that formerly the Creeks did not allow their children to hang around where old people were conversing, for they thought that by standing around them and looking at them they would get into the habit of telling lies and also that

[14] Stiggins, Ms. [15] Hitchcock, Ms. notes. [16] Adair, Hist. Am. Inds., p. 86.

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the old people might bewitch them. This does not speak very highly for the reputation for veracity enjoyed by the aged. It was thought that any old man who had passed through as many fastings as most of them had undergone at that time of life might be a wizard. It was feared that he might shoot a pain into the child or injure it in some other manner. One of my informants said he had often been slapped hard enough to be knocked down when he was standing near some of the old people. The following from Adair gives additional information regarding witchcraft among the Chickasaw, and contains the only extant account of an exorcism to preserve the house from evil influences. He says:

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"In the year 1765, an old physician, or prophet, almost drunk with spirituous liquors, came to pay me a friendly visit: his situation made him more communicative than he would have been if quite sober. When he came to the door, he bowed himself half bent, with his arms extended north and south, continuing so perhaps for the space of a minute. Then raising himself erect, with his arms in the same position, he looked in a wild frightful manner, from the south-west toward the north, and sung on a low bass key *Yo Yo Yo Yo*, almost a minute, then *He He He He*, for perhaps the same space of time, and *Wa Wa Wa Wa*, in like manner; and then transposed and accented those sacred notes several different ways, in a most rapid guttural manner. Now and then he looked upwards, with his head considerably bent backward; his song continued about a quarter of an hour. As my door which was then opened stood east, his face of course looked toward the west; but whether the natives thus usually invoke the deity, I cannot determine; yet as all their winter houses have their doors toward the east, had he used the like solemn invocations there, his face would have consequently looked the same way, contrary to the usage of the heathens. After his song, he stepped in: I saluted him, saying, 'Are you come my beloved old friend?' he replied, *Arähre-O*, 'I am come in the name of Oea.'[16a] I told him, I was glad to see, that in this mad age, he still retained the old Chikkasah virtues. He said, that as he came with a glad heart to see me his old friend, he imagined he could not do me a more kind service, than to secure my house from the power of the evil spirits of the north, south, and west,—and, from witches, and wizards, who go about in dark nights, in the shape of bears, hogs, and wolves, to spoil people: 'the very month before, added he, we killed an old witch, for having used destructive charms.' Because a child was suddenly taken ill, and died, on the physician's false evidence, the father went to the poor helpless old woman who was sitting innocent,

[16a] This is Aiali, "I come," followed by a simple exclamation. The being "Oea" is contributed by Adair's imagination.